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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relation between peer rejection and aggression in minority fourth graders and the children's perception of the quality of their relationship with their mother. The instrument used was the sociometric procedure described by Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982). The quality of the parent-child relationship was then measured by a questionnaire/interview when the children were in sixth grade (N=71) and eighth grade (N=83). The results indicated that: (1) rejection and aggression in fourth grade predicted maternal involvement in eighth grade but not in sixth grade; (2) the aggressive, rejected eighth grade group reported being more involved with their mothers than did the aggressive, nonrejected group and the nonaggressive, rejected group; and (3) members of the aggressive, nonrejected group were significantly less intimate with their mothers than were members of the aggressive, rejected group, and were marginally less intimate than members of the nonaggressive, nonrejected group. A list of eight references is included. (BC)

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CHILDHOOD PEER REJECTION AND AGGRESSION AS PREDICTORS OF INTIMACY/INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PARENT IN ADOLESCENCE

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Abstract

The present study examined the relation between peer rejection and aggression in fourth grade and children's perception of the quality of their relationship with their mother in two cohorts of adolescents. 154 minority adolescents participated in the study. The quality of the parent-child relationship was measured by a questionnaire that included questions of intimacy/involvement and communication. Rejection and aggression in fourth grade predicted parental involvement in 8th grade but not in sixth. The aggressive rejected 8th grade group reported being more involved with their parents than the aggressive nonrejected and the nonaggressive rejected groups. Our speculation is that this group lacks interactions with peers and stays close to the family. The aggressive nonrejected group seemed to be the least involved with their families. Their nonrejected and aggressive status suggests that these adolescents have a peer group. It is our speculation that aggressive nonrejected adolescents' peer group is a deviant one.

Introduction

Recently investigators have shown that problematic parent-child relations are related to having difficulty in peer relations. For example, Dishion (1990) showed that parents who displayed inconsistent and negative behaviors were more likely to have sons who were rejected by peers. In addition, parental aggression and lack of parental involvement and supervision have been found to relate to childhood aggression (Bandura & Walters, 1959; McCord, McCord, & Howard, 1961). However, the relation between parental involvement and children's aggression and peer status is not clear.

In the present study, we investigated whether rejection and aggression in 4th grade can differentially predict the quality of children's relationships with their mother in 6th and 8th grades.

Method

Subjects

154 minority children were distributed in two age cohorts, 71 in the 6th grade cohort and 83 in the 8th grade cohort.

Measures

Sociometric assessment: In the spring of fourth grade both cohorts were administered the sociometric procedure described by Coie, Dodge and Coppotelli (1982). The rejected group were those children with a social preference z-score of ≤ -1.00 and the aggressive group were those with a standardized sum of fighting nominations of ≥ 1.00.

Intimacy/involvement interview: Both groups of adolescents were interviewed in school about their relationship with their mother. The interview consisted of a questionnaire including items designed to assess intimacy, communication and involvement with the mother.

The questionnaire was factor analyzed separately for the two cohorts. The results of the two factor analyses can be seen in the following table along with the items. Two factors emerged for both cohorts, the first factor included items representing involvement and intimacy and the second one included items regarding the quality of communication between the adolescent and the mother.

FACTOR ANALYSIS OF THE INTIMACY/INVOLVEMENT INTERVIEW

	INVOLVEMENT/ INTIMACY		COMMUNICATION	
	6th	8th	6th	8th
Importance to child of talks with mother about friend problems	.71	.60	-.28	-.14
Frequency of talks with mother about boy/girlfriend problems	.58	.44	.19	.33
Importance to mom of talks with child about friend problems	.56	.67	.08	-.17
Frequency of talks with mother about friend problems	.56	.63	.02	.10
How often is mother disappointed when child does not talk to her about problems?	-	.56	-	.19
Frequency of talks with mother about school problems	.54	.55	-.04	.10
Frequency of child leaving a note when gone	.37	.57	.30	-.19

How often does mom tell child she loves him/her?	-	.50	-	.01
Does child go places without mother's permission?	-.37	-	-.04	-
Does child play with children mom does not know?	-	-.32	-	.11
Frequency of child's questioning of mom's decisions about child	-.11	-.06	.81	.64
Frequency of child's questioning of mom's decisions about mom	-.07	-.06	.62	.62
How pleased is mom with child's report card?	.11	-	.36	-
How often is child allowed to express anger?	.18	-.29	.35	.34

Six of the 10 items on the involvement/intimacy factor were common between the two cohorts, and three out of five items were common on the communication factor. One item loaded on both factors in each of the two cohorts' factor analysis. In order to be able to test similar models for the two cohorts, only the items that composed the involvement/intimacy and the communication subscales for both cohorts were used. As a result the involvement/intimacy subscale consisted of six items with an a-coefficient of .76, and the communication subscale consisted of three items with an a-coefficient of .58.

Results

One 2(rejection) x 2 (aggression) x 2 (sex) MANOVA was calculated for each cohort for the involvement/intimacy and communication factors.

1. No multivariate effect was evident for the 6th grade cohort.

2. No multivariate effect was evident for sex.

3. For the 8th grade cohort, there was a significant multivariate effect for rejection (F [2,70] = 3.96, $p < .02$) which was due to the involvement/intimacy subscale (F univ. [1, 71] = 5.98, $p<.02$). Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the involvement/intimacy scale as a function of rejection. This result suggests that rejected adolescents were closer and more intimate with their mothers than nonrejected adolescents. This main effect was further b qualified by the following interaction.

4. A significant aggression by rejection multivariate effect was also found for the 8th grade cohort (F [2,70] = 4.98, p <.009). This effect was again due to the involvement/intimacy subscale (F univ. [1,71] = 8.84 p < .004). Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for the involvement/intimacy scale as a function of rejection and aggression. The contrast analysis showed that the aggressive rejected group was significantly more involved with their mother than the aggressive nonrejected (F[1] = 9.71, p < .02) and the nonagressive rejected groups (F[1] = 5.84, p < .02). Finally, the aggressive nonrejected group was marginally less involved with their parent than the nonaggressive nonrejected group (F[1] = 3.21, p < .08).

Table 1

Involvement/intimacy means of the rejected and nonrejected 8th grade adolescents

	Rejected	Nonrejected
Mean	3.28	3.04
SD	2.35	2.13
n	26	53

Table 2

Involvement/intimacy means of the aggressive and rejected groups in the 8th grade cohort

		Nonrejected	Rejected
Nonaggressive	Mean	3.11	2.98
	SD	.93	.82
	n	47	15
Aggressive	Mean	2.47	3.68
	SD	.85	.94
	n	6	11

Conclusions

1. Rejection and aggression in 4th grade predicted maternal involvement and intimacy in 8th grade but not in sixth grade. The lack of a relation between rejection and the subsequent mother-adolescent relationship may be due to the fact that 6th graders are just beginning to separate themselves from their parents and move closer to their peer group (Furman & Buhrmester, 1985). As a result there is not much variance among 6th graders in their relationships with their mother.

2. The aggressive rejected 8th grade group reported being more involved with their mothers than the aggressive nonrejected and the nonaggressive rejected groups. This finding suggests that the combination of rejection with aggression may be problematic for adolescents in that it seems to interfere with the normal developmental process of separating from the family and receiving increasing levels of social support from the peer group (Hunter & Youniss, 1982; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985).

3. The aggressive nonrejected group was significantly less intimate with their mother than the aggressive rejected group and marginally less intimate with their mother than the nonaggressive nonrejected group. Given the small size of this group (n=6) limited conclusions can be reached. On the other hand, Cairns (1988) and Kupersmidt et. al. (1991) have suggested that aggressive children tend to have substantial peer networks and especially with other aggressive children. Taken together, we suggest that the nonrejected aggressive adolescents with low involvement with their mothers may be the ones involved in deviant peer groups.

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